



Pass-it-on Christmas

MEETING AIM

To explore the Christmas story in our socially distant world.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2

BACKGROUND

The format of this service is slightly different from our usual service plans, but then Christmas services often drift from our normal pattern. This service has been written specifically to be held over video conferencing software or be filmed for YouTube. It's less interactive than normal, to make it as flexible as possible. However, if you're on Zoom or similar and have the facility to interact, then do put those elements in, if desired. This service could also be put on 'live' if you are able to have an in-person service.

Ask different individuals or households to take on the different characters. You can have more than one relative, shepherd and wise person. Ensure that you have as diverse a group of ages and backgrounds taking part as you can.

Make seven scrolls out of paper – you could even stain them with tea to make them look old! Give each individual or household playing a character a scroll, keeping one for yourself. Encourage them to dress up as much as they can to reflect their character.

The carols listed are suggestions, feel free to change to other carols instead, particularly if you have ones that the children or young people in your church enjoy singing.

WELCOME

Welcome everyone and thank them for joining you. Right at the start of the service, share how you first encountered the Christmas story and the good news of Jesus.

Explain that you are going to hear from all the different characters in the Christmas story, and see how they pass their story on to us. Hold up your scroll and then pass it out of shot. The person playing Isaiah should bring their own scroll in from the side, as if accepting it from you.

ISAIAH

The first presenter, dressed as Isaiah, should open the scroll and read:

"I am the prophet Isaiah; hear the words of the Lord! The people walking in darkness have seen a great light! A child is born to us, a son. He will be called Immanuel – God with us."

SONG: Isaiah pauses. Sing 'O come, O come Emmanuel' together.

"He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He will reign in peace for ever! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to this Son."

He rolls up his scroll and passes it out of shot.

MARY

The second actor, dressed as Mary, brings her own scroll from the side, as if accepting it from Isaiah:

"Hello! My name's Mary. I'm just an ordinary girl, but let me tell you about an extraordinary day I had. I had just come home from shopping. I'd got everything on my list from the market." She unrolls the scroll and reads. "Grain to make bread, cabbage, oranges... Suddenly, a huge, shining figure appeared in front of me. It was an angel! He told me I was going to have a baby. Well, all that seemed impossible, but the angel said the baby would be God's Son. And nothing is impossible with God!"

SONG: Mary pauses. Sing 'O come, all ye faithful' together (missing out the last verse).

"Well, I agreed to be part of God's plan and the angel went away! But the thing was, I was engaged to Joseph."

She rolls up her scroll and passes it out of shot.

JOSEPH

The next presenter, dressed as Joseph, brings his own scroll from the side, as if accepting it from Mary:

"Can you imagine it? You're engaged to be married to someone, but then you find out they're pregnant. And you know the child isn't yours. What was I meant to do? I could have shamed Mary and told everyone what she had been up to. But I liked her, so I decided to break it off quietly. Then one night, I had a dream. Not just any old dream, but one about an angel from God! He told me the child was God's Son, and I should marry Mary. And that child was to be called Jesus."

SONG: Joseph pauses. Sing 'Joy to the world' together.

"We got married, but then another bombshell came. The emperor ordered a census!" He unrolls his scroll and reads: "Everyone has to go back to their hometown to be counted.' Well, I come from Bethlehem, and we had to travel around 75 miles to get there!"

He rolls up his scroll and passes it out of shot.

JOSEPH'S RELATIVE

The next presenter, dressed as a relative of Joseph, brings their own scroll from the side, as if accepting it from Joseph:

"Bethlehem is usually a sleepy little town, but the emperor's census meant that it was packed full of people coming home to be counted. It was ear to armpit in our house. Cousins Judith and Simon were in the guest room upstairs with their children. We found a corner for Uncle Thomas, and a space by the window to put my cousin Simeon. And then Joseph turned up with his pregnant wife. We had to squeeze them in next to where we keep the animals. It wasn't long before the time came for the baby to be born..."

SONG: The relative pauses. Sing 'Silent night' together.

"So I was sent to the midwife with this message." They unroll their scroll and read. "Come quick! We've got on baby on the way! Now! Off I went, and it wasn't long after that Jesus was born. But the midwife wasn't the only visitor we had to our crowded house that night."

They roll up their scroll and pass it out of shot.

SHEPHERD

The next presenter, dressed as a shepherd, brings their own scroll from the side, as if accepting it from Joseph's relative:

"It was a quiet night. Almost a silent night, apart from the sheep bleating away. Thaddeus, Levi and I had settled down for a kip when suddenly a huge, shining figure appeared in front of us. He said such amazing things that I had to write them down." They unroll their scroll and read. "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' And then a whole gang, a group, a gaggle of angels appeared in the sky, singing and praising God!"

SONG: The shepherd pauses. Sing 'While shepherds watched' together.

"Well, we could not wait to go and see! We rushed to the town and found the house. There, amidst all the family, was Joseph, Mary and a child lying in a manger, just as the angel had said – Jesus. We worshiped the newborn Lord, and then took our leave, telling everyone we met what we had seen! But we weren't the only people to learn about Jesus from the shining skies."

They roll up their scroll and pass it out of shot.

WISE MAN

The next presenter, dressed as a wise man, brings their own scroll from the side, as if accepting it from the shepherd:

"Greetings! I'm a wise man, a Magi. That means I study the stars. One night, we noticed a strange new star in the sky. We consulted our charts, scrolls and writings to find out what the star meant." They unroll their scroll and look puzzled at it. "We realised that this star meant a new king had been born. We packed up our camels and travelled west to find this king. When we got to Jerusalem, we went to the palace – well, where else would a king be? But the king there, Herod, wasn't the right person. The chief priests said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. So off we went again!"

SONG: The wise man pauses. Sing 'O little town of Bethlehem' together.

"The star showed the way and it stopped over a house. Inside, we found Mary, Joseph and a little boy – Jesus. We worshiped this young king, and gave him our gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. And do you know what? People still worship this king today!"

They roll up their scroll and pass it out of shot.

CHRISTIANS TODAY

You should bring your own scroll from the side, as if accepting it from the wise man:

"You know what? That wise man was right! There are millions of people all over the world who worship Jesus. We know all about him through the Bible. The Bible tells us of us of God's love for his people. He wanted to be friends with the people of the world, but the people of the world walked away from him. So God sent his Son, Jesus, to be the Messiah, the saviour who would repair the relationship with God. Listen to what Jesus said about this. Unroll your scroll and read. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'"

SONG: Pause. Sing 'Hark! The herald angels sing' together.

"If you don't yet know this prince of peace, this Son of God, this saviour, this newborn king, then you can find out more about him!"

If time, you could interview someone about their response to the Christmas story and when they first heard about Jesus. Have some kind of mechanism where people can find out about Jesus. This might be to fill in an online form, take part in a Zoom call or go to an evangelistic website.

PRAYER AND CLOSE

Finish the service by praying, thanking God for sending Jesus and asking him to help us meet Jesus anew this Christmas. Close the service, letting everyone know what activities they can get involved in over the Christmas period and into the new year.

ALEX TAYLOR

is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.



Kelvin and the *Karate Kid* kicker

A crowd buzzed around Mr Marsh as he pinned up a poster on the drama noticeboard.

"What is it?"

"Mr Marsh, what musical are we doing?"

"Is it *Grease 2*?"

Mr Marsh had a proud smile on his face. "No," he said. "We have been chosen by some Broadway producers to trial a new musical – *The Karate Kid*." And with that, he walked off down the corridor.

"The Karate what?"

"Never heard of it."

"What's *The Karate Kid*?"

Kelvin and Nadiya looked at each other in confusion. Ethan came up behind them and peered at the poster. "The Karate Kid? Isn't that the ancient film *Cobra Kai* is based on?"

Nadiya grinned: "Ooh, I love that! I binged all the episodes when it came onto Netflix." She looked at Kelvin. "You'd make a brilliant Daniel LaRusso!"

"Yeah," said Ethan. "You'd totally have that sewn up. What do you think, Chloe?"

Chloe stopped reading the small print on the poster and turned around. "What? Yes! Kelvin! You'd be brilliant in the lead role!"

Before long, the whole crowd agreed that the part was Kelvin's. No contest.

"Settle down!" Mr Marsh tried to calm everyone down. "So, the Broadway producers are coming today to approve the cast and see how we're getting on. Best behaviour, people."

Three stylish, rich-looking Americans walked in and the cast settled into an excited hush. Mr Marsh made the introductions and then they turned to look at the group of young people.

"Where is the one who is to play Daniel LaRusso?" asked the most stylish, richest-looking visitor.

Kelvin stood up: "That'll be me."

The stylish and rich-looking woman looked confused. "No. We saw his audition tape when it came in and we have come to see him." She pulled out a printed screenshot of someone wearing karate clothes. Someone who was not Kelvin.

There was uproar.

"That's Harry!" Chloe said. "He's more of a footballer than an actor."

"Well, where can we find this Harry?" asked the stylish and rich-looking woman.

"Well, he's probably having lunch in the canteen," said Ethan.

"Right then," said the stylish and rich-looking woman. "To the canteen."

And with that, they swept out of the school hall. Mr Marsh fought unsuccessfully to restore order among the cast. Kelvin stood there, fuming.

"Are you alright, Kelvin?" asked Nadiya.

"I'm going to get Harry. In fact, I'm going to make sure the whole football team suffers."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chat about the story, what everyone liked and didn't like. You could use some of these questions in your discussion:

- How do you think Kelvin felt when he heard he hadn't got the part?
- What do you think of Kelvin's reaction?
- Have you ever been in the same position as Kelvin?

This story is based on Matthew 2:1-18. If you'd like to add a more explicit faith element to your discussion, then read this passage together. Think about the similarities and differences between the Bible story and this one. Encourage everyone to think about this Bible story in a new way.

Christmas

No surprise here! It's Christmas craft activities all the way. You can share these ideas with the families in your church, use them to create a craft party (in-person or online, as restrictions allow) or supplement a First Steps or Growing Together session.

Together session one: SPECIAL MESSAGES



You will need: matchboxes; glue; coloured paper; white paper; felt-tip pens; scissors

In the accounts of the Nativity in the first two chapters of Luke and Matthew, both Mary and Joseph encounter an angel who has a message for each of them. This craft gives a chance to explore the angel's

words and write a special message.

Choose Mary or Joseph and think about what the angel says to each of them. Cut out a speech bubble shape that will fit inside the matchbox and, on it, write something the angel said to either Mary or Joseph. Stick it inside the matchbox and close the box. Decorate the outside of the box to reflect your chosen character – maybe with their name or a picture. Can people guess what might be written inside? Open the box to see the message. This is a great opportunity to talk to children about what they would have felt if they were Mary or Joseph and what struck them the most about the angel encounters.

Together session two: SHINING ANGELS



You will need: paper squares; scissors; glue; battery-operated tea lights

While the shepherds are in the fields watching their sheep, angels appear to them and the sky is filled with God's glory. In this craft, the angels certainly shine!

Take a paper square and fold it in half diagonally to make a triangle. Fold it in half again and then again making the triangle smaller. Now use scissors to cut pieces out of the edges of the triangle, as if you are making a snowflake. When you have finished, open the square out again. Arrange the square so that it is standing upright like a pyramid, taking the middle of the square as the apex. (See the photo. This might require a bit of adjusting with glue!) This is the body of your angel. Cut out some wings and stick them on the back of the body. Cut out a head shape and stick that onto the front of the body. Put a battery-operated candle under the angel so that the light can shine through.

Together session three: STAR COMPASS



You will need: needles; magnets; craft foam; scissors; a big bowl; water; a compass or phone with a compass app

The wise men follow the strange star to find the baby. This craft is a star that also leads the way.

Cut a star shape out of the craft foam. Your needle will have a sharp end and an end with an eye. Your magnet will either be labelled with a north and south pole or will have two sides. Take your needle and rub the sharp end of it over the north end of the magnet 30 times (rub in the same direction every time). If your magnet is not labelled, just choose one of the sides to start with. Now take the eye end of the needle, and rub it 30 times in the same direction over the south end (or other side) of the magnet. Thread the needle through the foam star and float the star on the water. Watch as one end of the needle gravitates and points towards the North and think about how the wise men followed the direction of the star.

Together session four: CROWN FOR A KING



You will need: paper; scissors; glue; pipe cleaners; buttons; ribbons; card; sequins; pompoms; tissue paper

In the Nativity story, there are two kings. Herod is a vicious murderer, scared that another king will steal his power, while Jesus is the powerful, holy king who has been promised to God's people. This craft is about

creating a crown to fit the character.

Have a conversation about the two different kings in the Nativity story. How does Herod contrast with Jesus? Ask children to choose either Herod or Jesus and to make a crown for them. They can use colours, shapes and textures that, to them, represent their chosen character. Can others guess which king the crown belongs to just by looking?

Christmas games

It's Christmas. And yes, like most things this year, Christmas won't be the same as before. However, it is still Christmas! You can still have fun over video calling or, if restrictions allow, in person. Here are some games that might suit this different festive season.



ELF QUEST

You will need: a list of famous people and people from your church whom the children or young people know; stopwatch or phone

Explain that you're going to read out a name, and the players have to pretend to be Santa's elves. They should go and find something in their house that might be a suitable present for that person. Read out the first name and give a time limit (30 seconds, for example) for the players to find a present.

When everyone has come back, ask each person to justify their choice, then all vote on which present would be the best.

TOP-OF-THE-HEAD MASTERPIECE

You will need: cardboard from the recycling; marker pens; list of Christmas objects or people; stopwatch or phone

Before the session, ask players to collect cardboard that would otherwise go in the recycling, such as cereal or biscuit boxes. They could even use corrugated card boxes that deliveries often come in. If some players don't have any, then you could deliver some. If you're having an in-person party, ask them to bring their cardboard with them. (Have unopened packs of paper plates for those who don't have any, or who forget.)

Ask the players to put a piece of cardboard on the top of their head. Call out the first item on your list (eg snowman). The players have to draw a picture of a snowman, keeping the card on their head. They are not allowed to look. After 30 seconds, ask everyone to show their picture. Decide together who has drawn the most recognisable picture, and award points. Then read out the next item and play again. The player with the most points wins.

Make sure you recycle all your cardboard after the game.

FESTIVE FIRST LETTERS

You will need: list of Christmas categories; stopwatch or phone; cards each with a letter of the alphabet written on

Before the game, come up with a list of Christmas categories, such as 'Things you might eat for Christmas dinner', 'Presents you might get from your nan', or 'Christmas songs'.

Ask the group to draw out a five-by-five table on their sheet of paper. Read out the first four categories and ask them to write them in the first column. Then pick out four letter cards and ask them to write those letters across the first row.

Give the group a time limit and then challenge them to think of things that begin with the four letters that might fit into one of the four categories. They should write them in the appropriate box on their table.

CHRISTMAS BEETLE

You will need: pencils; paper; dice

Each player needs a pencil, paper and a dice. If you're meeting over video calling, then you might need to send out dice if people don't have them. Just like an ordinary game of beetle, players have to throw different numbers with the dice and then draw on different parts of a beetle. However, in this version, players have to draw a Christmas tree.

- 1 Strings of tinsel (of which there are two)
- 2 Strings of fairy lights (two)
- 3 Baubles (six)
- 4 Presents underneath (two)
- 5 Star on top (one)
- 6 Body of the tree (one)

Players have to draw a six to start. The first player to complete the whole tree wins, or you could set a time limit, and the player with the most items on their tree wins.

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Home Alone (PG)

Watch the whole film together or concentrate on the clip:
01:06:50 to 01:13:12

SYNOPSIS

Kevin McCallister (Macaulay Culkin) is an arrogant eight-year-old boy who hates the fact that he is part of a family that constantly bullies him. When his family set off for their Paris Christmas vacation, they leave him behind by accident. Despite this, Kevin makes the best of this situation, as he finally earns the freedom he's always wished for by jumping on beds, eating ice cream, watching gangster movies and doing whatever he pleases. However, two robbers, Marv and Harry, invade his neighbourhood, stealing the precious valuables of his neighbours. Now, it's up to Kevin to save the day. He must protect his house from being robbed before it's too late, with a series of traps.

There are many central themes that could be unpacked (with some interesting comparisons with the parable of the prodigal son), but on a recent rewatch I was struck by a scene between Kevin and his neighbour, and this has become the focus of this session.

DISCUSS

This session is primarily aimed at children and younger young people, but can be explored with groups of older ages as well. To get your children thinking, chat about the following questions:

- Do you have any Christmas traditions that you enjoy?
- Are there any experiences or feelings of Christmas that you miss from when you were younger?
- Do you have a favourite Christmas film?

This clip is a touching scene that takes place inside a church between Kevin and his neighbour, Marley. Having previously been frightened of Marley due to some lies his siblings have told him, Kevin finds comfort in his conversation when feeling at his lowest. Somewhat surprisingly it is Marley who leaves the conversation challenged to change his ways and reconnect with his family.

After showing the clip as a stimulus, discuss these questions together:

- Why has Marley lost contact with his family?
- "This is the place to be if you're feeling bad about yourself." What do you think about the quote from Marley to Kevin?
- In conversation with Kevin, Marley says: "You can be too old for a lot of things, but you're never too old to be afraid." Do you agree?
- What do you think it is about the church setting that appealed to Kevin when he felt lonely and sad?
- How did the choir music make you feel during the scene?

Focus on the Christmas story; summarise the story (or maybe ask your children how much they can recall) and then read through Luke 2:1-21 (or talk through the story for younger children). Once you have done this, discuss the following questions:

- What do you think is the most important moment in the story? Why?
- Do you think anyone would have felt afraid in the story at any point? Why?
- Why is the Christmas story important for Christians?
- Why would God choose for Jesus to be placed in a manger shortly after his birth? Should Jesus have had a birth that reflected his importance more?

As you experience a Christmas that is different from your previous experiences, how can you still connect and support one another?

Home Alone is available on Disney+.

TOM WADE

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The star

ARTIST: Mariah Carey

SUITABLE FOR: tens to 13s

INTRODUCTION

This song was recorded by 'Christmas Queen', Mariah Carey, for the film, *The Star*. The movie retells the story of the Nativity through the eyes of the animals, with a focus on the importance of the star. Young people of this age may be familiar with the film, perhaps having seen it in recent years. The lyrics of this song confuse truth with nice sentiments and this session is designed to help the young people divide the two.

Begin the session by talking about Christmas: what are you looking forward to? How are you celebrating this year? What are you hoping for this Christmas? How different might it be from normal?

Go on to ask the young people how they and their families celebrate the Christmas story, if at all. Explain to the group that we have many different ways to celebrate and we connect to the story in different ways. It is a part of our heritage, but over time some of the 'traditions' we have developed have nothing to do with the story at all. Explain to the group that even when we remember the wise men, for instance, we have developed our own traditions (for example, celebrating three kings).

LISTEN AND DISCUSS

Play the track, displaying a copy of the lyrics for young people to follow. As a group, discuss:

- How do you feel about this song?
- What do you like about the song?
- Which lyrics stand out most to you?

Tell the group to find some felt-tip pens and explain that you are going to look at this song more closely. You may like to make sure the group has access to Bibles so they can check through details of the story. Together with the young people, go through the lyrics and write down in three different colours: the parts of the song which relate specifically to the wise men, the parts of the song which are true about what God has done for us, and finally the parts which may sound nice, but are nonsense and don't reveal anything about what God has done for us.

Explain to the group that the same is true for many of our traditions; we put together things and feelings that make us feel good with truths. But the truth is, Jesus coming to be born among us is the best news and doesn't need any embellishment. As you close, pray for the group, that they would encounter this incredible good news for themselves this Christmas.

Use this activity as part of an in-person session or over video conferencing (such as Zoom or FaceTime).

BECKY MAY

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Gestures

I recently took myself off for an impromptu retreat on the coast for a few days. As ever, budget was tight and I really wanted to visit Whitby Abbey ruins (they feature in a novel I wrote a few years ago). I didn't have enough cash to buy long enough in the car park, so when a complete stranger approached me asking if I wanted his ticket with four hours left, I was so blessed. It was a small thing but to me it made my day – and enabled my plan for my entire retreat to work. There's a framed quote from Aesop in our downstairs toilet that reads: "No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted."

Kindness is nice from a stranger, but in my mind it's even nicer coming from a friend who you know cares for you. The very act reminds you of that fact. It is more than random, it is intentional. I remember when I first set out to write a novel. I had no idea what I was doing but a friend knew I had that dream. She bought me a beautiful wooden fountain pen and a Moleskin notebook to encourage me on my way.

Can you recall a specific gesture of love from a friend or mentor? What was it that struck such a chord in your heart? Take those feelings, dwell on them, recall them. Now imagine the look on a certain person's face if they had those feelings. Pay it forward. Who is it that needs that? What could you do that would make them feel seen and known? It might just be symbolic – a gesture is about reminding them that that they are known and held and loved, that you believe in them and that you know what's important to them. A gesture tells them you have been listening and you have been thinking about them from afar. It's so powerful. Oftentimes kind gestures stay with a person for a long time – years, even – because they are personal and symbolic and specific.

This is a very tangible mentoring skill. Listen to your mentee's heart and their words, and then intentionally choose to do, act or say something that will become significant for them in years to come. A blessing and encouragement in a specific context. It can even become a regular habit; you can literally choose to do it – diarise it, even.

Jesus said: "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). In fact, the Bible says it 18 times. It also says that the whole law is fulfilled in that one statement (Galatians 5:14), so it's pretty important – and to me it is the essence and motivation of mentoring.

Use these questions to spark discussion with your mentee, but at the same time, use it to sharpen your own mentoring:

- Where is your mentee at?
- What is important to them right now?
- What do you discern that they need at the moment – spiritually and emotionally?
- What gestures can you make to show you have heard their heart, their dreams or their pain?
- Is it a gift? A symbol? An offer of help, assistance, or accompaniment? Perhaps take them to a memorable place to do it.

Become a master of gestures. Be a mentor of gestures.

JOEL TOOMBS

has an MA in Christian mentoring and wrote the *Mentoring and Young People Grove* booklet. He is a volunteer youth worker.

NOT AFRAID

Doodle and draw your prayers around this verse from Luke 2:10.
Draw what you're scared of in the word 'afraid' and give these to God.
Think about what would be 'good news' to the world right now and doodle
that around those words as your prayer.



Praise God by drawing the things that
make you happy around the word 'joy'.